

Horticultural Highlights – Late Summer 2024

Crapemyrtles – Garden-wide

Norfolk Botanical Garden has the only recognized collection of crapemyrtles (*Lagerstroemia* species and hybrids) in North America, and likely the world. Our climate is extremely well adapted to their growth, closely mimicking the climate of their native Asia. They have been an important part of our collection since Fred Huette first encouraged area gardeners to plant them last century. Today they are the official tree of the city of Norfolk, and comprise over half of all street trees on city property. They are currently past their peak, bloom-wise, but still quite colorful.

Hardy Ginger – Subtropical Garden

Gardeners in Coastal Virginia are fortunate enough to live in a climate where a variety of hardy gingers (*Hedychium* species) can grow. They bring any garden a touch of the tropics with their bold foliage and exotic flowers, some of which are quite fragrant. Late summer is the best time to see their gorgeous blooms.

Roses – Bicentennial Rose Garden

NBG has one of the largest rose gardens on the East Coast. Although they will bloom from mid-spring until the first good freeze, their peak bloom is typically around Mother's Day, and again in October when the weather cools.

Joe-Pye Weed – Pollinator Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, Border Garden, and elsewhere

These tall robust plants (*Eutrochium* species) are a spectacular summer blooming native perennial. Their large mauve flowerheads are very attractive to butterflies, and later on, seed-eating birds will relish the ripe seeds. The plants namesake was purported to be a native American herbal healer who used a variety of plants to treat illness, including Joe-Pye weed.

Papyrus – Renaissance Court

Growing in pots in the fountain at Renaissance Court this summer is papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), one of the most important plants to ancient Egyptian culture. Not only was it used to make one of the earliest forms of paper, but it was also cultivated for food, medicine, and boats were made with bundles of its stems.

Society Garlic – Café, Baker Perennial Garden

Despite being native in faraway South Africa, society garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*) does very well here. It gets its common name for the aroma of its foliage, which indeed smells like garlic. The pale violet flowers begin blooming in early summer and continue through early fall. Tolerant of heat, deer, full sun, and drought – it is an easy plant to grow.

Black-eyed Susans – Garden-wide

One of the most prolific genera of North American native plants is *Rudbeckia*, commonly referred to as black or brown-eyed Susan, or coneflower. There are many different species that do well in our climate and summer is their season to shine. Their flowers attract insect pollinators, and their ripe seeds offer many birds sustenance.

Flowering Dogwood – Garden-wide

Among many other admirable attributes, this tree (*Cornus florida*) is the very first tree to take on fall foliage color. Weeks before other trees even consider changing, flowering dogwood starts to turn shades of red and burgundy. It is a marker of things to come.

Ornamental Grasses – Garden-wide

There are many ornamental grasses at NBG with multiple species represented. They are the perfect way to add texture to the landscape, and with a slight breeze they also add movement. Late in the summer many varieties are in full flower.

Cotton – WOW Grain Plain

Cotton (*Gossypium* species) is one of the most important commercial crops in the world, and was first domesticated as early as 5000 B.C. A member of the mallow family, some of its botanical cousins are okra, hibiscus, and hollyhock. Despite being grown for utilitarian purposes, it has beautiful flowers as well.

Pitcher Plants – Virginia Native Plant Garden

Some of our most unusual native plants are the native pitcher plants (*Sarracenia* species). They have flowers like few others, and the plants themselves are made up of colorful pitcher-like structures. However, there is a dark side. Pitcher plants are carnivorous and lure unsuspecting insects into their pitchers, where the prey will find the structure covered in downward facing hairs which make it impossible to climb out. Waiting at the bottom of the pitcher is not sweet tea, but digestive juices ready to help turn insects into plant food.

Devil's Walking Stick – Enchanted Forest

One look at the vicious thorn covered stems, and you will know why this woodland native (*Aralia spinosa*) is named the way it is. Earlier in the season it had frothy white flowers that attracted a wide variety of beneficial insects. Now its dark purple-black fruits are ripening, which berry-eating birds will relish. Later the foliage will turn an attractive golden yellow.

Goldenrod – Garden-wide

With their golden yellow flowers, goldenrod (*Solidago*) is one of September's signature plants. It is also one of North America's most prolific wildflowers, with 80 different native species. There are goldenrods for just about every garden niche, from sun to shade, wet or dry, salty or not. They are also amazing beneficial insect attractors, and many birds will relish the ripe seeds.

Butterfly House – Butterfly Garden

Our butterfly house is open from mid-June until late September. Inside you will not only find an assortment of butterflies native to Virginia, but you will also find volunteers and interns who can tell you everything you need to know. Both inside the house and in the Butterfly Garden you can see a wide variety of plants that attract adult butterflies, but just as important you will see a variety of host plants that caterpillars need. *See it while you can!*

Bonsai Collection – Transition Garden

NBG is somewhat unique that our bonsai collection is a collaboration between staff and a group of dedicated and passionate volunteers. Over the past few years they have been able to substantially grow our collection and it now includes some amazing pieces, many of which were created from ordinary plants growing in our gardens or nursery.

Wildlife Watch – Great egrets are year-round local residents, and they are a common sight as you enter NBG along the causeway. Here fish are concentrated as they are funneled through the culverts that connect one side of Lake Whitehurst with the other. This makes fishing easy for these graceful shorebirds.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture